

## **ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILLS 5190 & 5193**

### **House Committee on Senior Health, Security & Retirement September 9, 2009**

The Alzheimer's Association is pleased to offer its support of both House Bill 5190 and 5193 being considered here today. We are pleased with the legislature's interest in protecting vulnerable adults including those with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. We were very supportive of the recommendations of the Elder Abuse Task Force and believe that these legislative measures are needed and appropriate.

People with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia are particularly vulnerable to being exploited. Memory loss and paranoia, symptoms of the disease, can make it difficult to discover when abuse or exploitation is occurring. It is therefore very important that third party observers be allowed to bring forward allegations and complaints that will be acted on by the court. It is equally important that those who would prey upon our elderly and most vulnerable in society be punished for doing so and not in any way reap financial benefit from their actions. We support the measures being proposed in HB 5193 to protect vulnerable adults from financial exploitation.

Additionally, the Alzheimer's Association supports creating "Silver" or "Senior" Alert systems, such as proposed in House Bill 5190, that address the needs of persons with dementia and their families and effectively disseminate relevant information about missing individuals. Although HB 5190 is aimed at assisting a broader group of adults than just those with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia, the Association believes it is important that such legislation recognizes the specific issues faced by persons with dementia and their caregivers.

Six in ten people with Alzheimer's disease will wander. They might become disoriented and lost, even in their own neighborhood. Although common, the wandering behavior can be dangerous. If not found within 24 hours, half of those who wander risk serious injury or death. Wandering is among the biggest challenges caregivers face.

There are several criteria that are important to the Association with regard to any type of "Senior Alert" legislation. At a minimum, such legislation should:

- 1) Ensure that there is no confusion with, or use of, the Amber Alert system in implementation of a Silver Alert or Senior Medical Alert;
- 2) Ensure that there is a mechanism allowing those responsible for sending out the alert to limit the scope of the alert geographically (ie. most people who wander are found less than 1.5 miles from home, so statewide alerts are not cost effective or useful.)
- 3) Ensure that first responders and law enforcement personnel receive dementia training, so that they know when it is appropriate to send an alert or not;

- 4) Allow local searching to begin immediately upon receiving report of the disappearance;
- 5) Ensure that the family/caregivers of the person with dementia do not have to come up with documentation of a diagnosis of dementia before anyone will look for the wanderer;
- 6) Support interoperability and communication with the Association's existing MedicAlert + Safe Return program;
- 7) Collect data on Alert usage and regularly evaluate program operation for the purpose of improving Alert system functionality;
- 8) Include a mechanism to enroll individuals in MedicAlert + Safe Return.

HB 5190 addresses many of these issues satisfactorily. However, Item 3, the critical need for dementia awareness training for law enforcement personnel, is something we would strongly advocate to have included in HB 5190. If law enforcement officers are going to be required to make determinations about such missing person reports and alerts, then they ought to be trained in identifying dementia and locating persons with dementia.

The Alzheimer's Association partners with MedicAlert and implements a nationwide identification and support program known as **Safe Return** which operates at the community level to assist in the safe return of individuals who wander. This program includes information and training modules for law enforcement officials, emergency personnel, and other community professionals who have a high potential for finding lost individuals. The program has facilitated more than 16,000 safe returns since its inception in 1993. (A fact sheet on Safe Return is attached.) The Alzheimer's Association would strongly encourage the legislature to include mandatory training for law enforcement in HB 5190 and would be happy to partner with law enforcement on this training curriculum.

Additionally, we are concerned for adults with early onset Alzheimer's, or related dementia, as these people are equally vulnerable, but would not meet the 60 and older requirement noted in HB 5190. We encourage the legislature to address this problem by dropping the age requirement.

If we can provide additional information, statistics or personal stories in support of either of these bills, we will be happy to do so. Please feel free to contact the Alzheimer's Association's state public policy coordinator, Sara Duris, for further input.  
(269-463-3542; [alzheimers\\_assoc.sduris@yahoo.com](mailto:alzheimers_assoc.sduris@yahoo.com) )

## **MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®**

The Alzheimer's Association and MedicAlert have formed an alliance to improve the safety of individuals with Alzheimer's or related dementia. MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return® is a 24-hour nationwide emergency response service for individuals with Alzheimer's or a related dementia that wander or who have a medical emergency.



### **How MedicAlert + Safe Return works**

If an individual with Alzheimer's or related dementia wanders and becomes lost, caregivers can call the 24-hour emergency response line (1.800.625-3780) to report it. A community support network will be activated, including local Alzheimer's Association chapters and law enforcement agencies, to help reunite the family member or caregiver with the person who wandered. With this enhanced service, critical medical information will be provided to emergency responders when needed.

### **MedicAlert + Safe Return features**

- One identification product (bracelet or necklace) that serves two purposes. It provides emergency medical information and assists in the event of a wandering incident.
- The member's personal health record lists medical conditions, medications and allergies and can be updated 24 hours a day through a private online account or by calling the toll-free number during business hours.
- A national database that includes a member's photo and emergency contact information to help reunite the lost person with his or her caregivers.
- The MedicAlert + Safe Return hotline activates the resources of law enforcement, medical professionals and the local chapter staff to assist the member when an incident – either wandering or medical emergency – occurs.

### **Cost for MedicAlert + Safe Return products**

- The enrollment fee is \$49.95 with an annual renewal fee of \$25. The enrollment kit includes 24-hour emergency response system, ID jewelry (bracelet or necklace), personalized emergency wallet card, personal health record, and "6 steps to a Safe Return refrigerator magnet," which provides useful tips when someone is missing.
- Companion caregiver jewelry can be purchased for \$25 with an annual renewal fee of \$25, which includes everything listed above.

**For safety and peace of mind, enroll in MedicAlert + Safe Return today:**  
Call 1.888.572.8566 (6 a.m. – 7 p.m. (PST) Monday – Friday and 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. (PST) Saturday) or online at [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org).

The Alzheimer's Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer care, support and research.

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**1.800.272.3900 | [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)**

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